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TALKING OF BUSINESS

Atlas Retiring From Sports Store
With \$1 Million Business in OffingBy TRUMAN R. TEMPLE
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What did Calvin Coolidge, Herbert Hoover and Franklin Delano Roosevelt have in common? Who labels Dwight D. Eisenhower a fresh-water man and FDR a salt-water man?

Where do Gen. Nathan F. Twining and Gen. Walter Bedell Smith pay good money for bird feathers?

The man with the answer to these riddles is Oliver Atlas, who is retiring this month from the presidency of Atlas Sports Store after 57 years behind the counter.

Friend of presidents, generals, and thousands of just plain weather-beaten outdoorsmen, "Ollie" Atlas is turning over the store at ninth and D streets N.W. to other members of the family.

At 70 Mr. Atlas figures he's earned a chance to do some full-time fishing off the Florida Keys and expects to head that way next month.

Since 1891

His store, oldest of its type in the District, has been in business since 1891. Calvin Coolidge bought a shotgun there—a Parker model, Mr. Atlas recalls—for hunting down south.

Franklin D. Roosevelt used to send an aide in for fresh bloodworms when he went fishing in North Carolina. Sidney Atlas, Oliver's brother, made a heavy trolling rod for Mr. Roosevelt's personal use in the 1930s.

One of the best fishing fans was former President Hoover, who had Mr. and Mrs. Atlas for a visit at his houseboat anchored off Craig, Fla. when Mr. Hoover was Commerce Secretary. And a close friend of Mr. Atlas was Brig. Gen. William L. (Billy) Mitchell, who whiled away his spare time during his court-martial here in 1925 by chatting with the store clerks about firearms.

Dark Outlook

Gen. Mitchell's running fight with brass hats over the role of air power had culminated in charges of insubordination against him.

"How does it look, General?" asked the store owner anxiously as the general toyed with a hunting rifle in front of the counter. "How's the trial going?"

"Aw, what the hell do they know about aviation?" replied the customer. "Ollie, they're going to crucify me."

His prophecy was accurate.



OLIVER ATLAS

Mr. Atlas has known no other career but the sporting goods store. His father, Simon, moved the family here from New York when Ollie was a year old and after a couple of experimental locations set up a variety store at 927 D street N.W.

It sold fishing tackle, clothing, even musical instruments. The son joined the staff when he was 13 in the midst of a recession, and stayed to learn the trade.

He was never happy about the diverse line of goods. Around 1910 he persuaded his father to toss out the suits and trombones and concentrate on sporting goods. It's been that way ever since, with volume increasing from \$100,000 worth a year to about \$750,000 today. "I figure we'll hit \$1 million before long," he adds.

Industry Changing

The store owner admits the sporting goods industry is changing rapidly these days. Women are invading the domain, and in response the store carries special lightweight hunting rifles and shotguns, waders in small female sizes, and outdoor clothing tailored rather stylishly for them. About 20 per cent of sales are items for women.

Another newcomer is the skin diving hobbyist. Sales of oxygen tanks, spears and other underwater paraphernalia tripled this year, according to Barton Levinson, store buyer.

In the rear of the store about noon most every day, a small band of Washington business executives gather to spin

yarns, exchange fishing news, and generally get in the way. Known as the "Dry Land Fishing Club," the group has no elected officers, no minutes of the last meeting, but powerful squatters' rights. Clerks climb over and around them to get at merchandise, as they have for years, with patient tolerance.

"That's one thing that'll never change," mutters a salesman.

Mr. Atlas is handing the job of president over to his wife, Bertha, who also is an expert with a trolling rod and recently won an award from the Miami (Fla.) Chamber of Commerce in a king mackerel fishing contest. Other new officers are his brother, Sidney, vice president; Robert Klein, a brother-in-law, as treasurer, and his son, Simon, as secretary and vice president.

All Outdoors Fans

It is a policy of the Atlas store that all its salesmen are either fishing or hunting fans in their spare time. Mr. Atlas keeps a dozen rods at home, and has followed the sport ever since his childhood when he used to catch bass by dragging a lure through the water's edge at the Tidal Basin.

Some of the Atlas customers have been faithful for decades. Gen. Smith first started coming there in the 1930s while at the Army War College.

A few years ago, after returning from Russia as U. S. Ambassador, the general gave a copy of his book, "My Three Years in Moscow," to the store operator.

It was inscribed, "To my friends Ollie and Bertha Atlas, who for more than 20 years have helped to keep me happy and broke. With my affection and most sincere good wishes."

The interest of Gen. Smith and Gen. Twining in bird feathers is clear to most sportsmen. They're both fond of tying their own fishing flies, and feathers is the principal material for this, another product handled by Atlas.

In contrast to his usually sunny associations with the White House, Mr. Atlas frowns and looks gloomy when President Truman's name is mentioned.

"He wasn't much of a sport," he declares.

Explanation: Mr. Truman bought no fishing tackle at his store.